SPORT

Vernon avoids crashes to win fourth stage of Tour Down Under

ADELAIDE: Ethan Vernon won a shortened fourth stage of the Tour down Under in brutal heat on Saturday with Jay Vine remaining on track to win the overall title.

The British NSN sprinter powered clear in the dash to the line in Willunga township to take the penultimate stage ahead of Denmark's Tobias Lund Andresen (Decathlon CMA CGM) and Australia's Laurence Pithie (Red Bull Bora Hansgrohe).

Vine overcame the loss of UAE Team Emirates teammate and defending champion Jhonatan Narvaez in a crash early in the stage to protect his substantial lead in the general classification heading into Sunday's final stage.

Vine, the 2023 winner, finished safely in the pack and holds a 1min 3sec buffer over Swiss Mauro Schmid (Team Jayco AlUla) with a further nine seconds to Australia's Harry Sweeny (EF Education-Easypost).

It was Vernon's first World Tour stage win since beating compatriot Matthew Brennan in the Volta Ciclista a Catalunya last March.

"I was sitting pretty comfy with 250m to go and I got a gap and held it to the line but everybody was suffering in the heat and the (NSN) boys did a very good job to keep me cool," Vernon said.

Vine had to contend with the shock loss of his closest GC rival Narvaez, who crashed out only a few minutes into the stage and was taken to hospital for concussion observation.

Vine also avoided another crash as the peloton jockeyed for position in a windy section of the course as the temperatures soared to 40C.

"Losing two team-mates today was hard not only for today but for tomorrow but everyone else stepped up to help keep me safe," Vine said.

"It's a hard stage tomorrow and we've also got the heat to contend with.

"We did a lot of work today to stay safe and my teammates have once again got to put in a big shift to help me tomorrow."

The forecast searing temperatures and extreme fire danger forced Tour organisers to abandon the demanding Willunga Hill climbs for safety reasons, reducing the stage to a largely flat 131km from its original 176km.—AFP

CORTINA: An aerial view shows the Milano Cortina 2026 Olympic Games sliding center venue hosting the luge and bobsleigh competitions on Saturday. The Winter Olympics begin on Feb 6, running until Feb 22.—AFP

Augsburg stage comeback win to snap Bayern's unbeaten run

MUNICH: Strugglers Augsburg scored twice in six minutes late in the second half to come from a goal down and stun hosts Bayern Munich 2-1 in the Bavarian derby on Saturday for the league leaders' first Bundesliga loss of the season.

The hosts, fresh from securing a Champions League knockout spot with Wednesday's 2-0 win over Union Saint-Gilloise, took a 23rd-minute lead with Hiroki Ito's header but lacked any spark up front as Augsburg struck in the 75th and 81st through Arthur Chaves and Han-Noah Massengo to earn their first win in Munich for 11 years.

Vincent Kompany's team are still 11 points clear at the top but second-placed Borussia Dortmund, on 39, could cut that gap with a win at Union Berlin later on Saturday. Augsburg climbed to 13th.

Bayern, unbeaten in their previous 27 league matches, never hit top speed but still dominated the first half, taking a 23rd-minute lead through Ito's header from a Michael Olise corner.

It was France international Olise's 14th assist in the league and his 22nd across all competitions this season.

Bayern, who travel to PSV Eindhoven on Wednesday for their final Champions League match in the league phase, missed several more good chances through Harry Kane, Luis Diaz and Lennart Karl before the visitors carved out their own best chance with the last kick in the first half and with Robin Fellhauer rattling the crossbar with a powerful shot.

Augsburg found more and more space after the break as Bayern's tempo dropped even further, and they tested Bayern keeper Jonas Urbig with a shot from Elvis Rexhbecaj and a fine free kick from Alexis Claude-Maurice.

They got their deserved equaliser in the 75th when Brazilian Chaves scored with the back of his head from a corner.

Six minutes later they completed their sensational comeback with Massengo tapping in from close range from a well-timed Dimitris Giannoulis cutback. Bayern hit the post with Olise's shot in stoppage time.Elsewhere, surprising Hoffenheim tightened their grip on a top-four spot with a come-from-behind 3-1 win at struggling Eintracht Frankfurt. Frankfurt, who sacked coach Dino Toppmoeller last Sunday, took the lead through Arnaud Kalimuendo with 18 minutes gone.

Hoffenheim turned the game round with three goals in 13 second-half minutes.

Max Moerstedt and Ozan Kabak scored, while Hoffenheim, relegation battlers last season, forced Aurele Amenda into an own goal to solidify their hold on third spot, three points behind second-placed Dortmund.

RB Leipzig cruised past Heidenheim 3-0 to move up to fourth, thanks to goals from Ridle Baku, Antonio Nusa and captain David Raum.

Former Real Madrid defender Lucas Vazquez scored the only goal as Bayer Leverkusen beat Werder Bremen 1-0 at home, breaking a three game losing streak.

The victory took the 2024 Bundesliga champions up to sixth.

Mainz 05 beat VfL Wolfsburg 3-1 to continue their recent resurgence. Rock-bottom at Christmas, Mainz have claimed nine points from their past six matches to climb into the relegation playoff spot.—Agencies

2029 Asian Winter Games in Saudi Arabia postponed

RIYADH: The Asian Winter Games, due to be held in Saudi Arabia in 2029, have been postponed, the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) and the Saudi Arabian Olympic Committee said in a joint statement on Saturday.

"The Saudi Olympic and Paralympic Committee and the (OCA) have agreed on an updated framework for future hosting of the Asian Winter Games, confirming the postponement of the 2029 edition to a later date to be announced in due course," the bodies said.

"Under the revised framework, Saudi Arabia will host a series of standalone winter sports events in the coming years. These competitions are designed to promote winter sports... while providing additional preparation time to support wider regional representation at future Asian winter events."

In August, the OCA had said preparations for the games were on schedule after South Korea and China emerged as potential replacements.

The OCA in 2022 unanimously approved the desert kingdom's bid to stage the Games at its $500 billion megacity NEOM, part of Saudi Arabia's splurge on major sporting events, including the 2034 football World Cup. However, Riyadh has appeared to stall on delivery of the ski resort and had discussed staging the event four years later than planned.

The Saudis were mulling approaching South Korea and China to instead play host in 2029, media reports at the time indicated. South Korea's Yonhap news agency reported that the OCA asked Korean Sport & Olympic Committee president Ryu Seung-min if the country would be willing to replace Saudi Arabia.

South Korea and China had been suggested as potential replacements because they hosted the Winter Olympics in 2018 and 2022 respectively. China also staged the Asian Winter Games in its northern city of Harbin in February.

The futuristic and under-construction NEOM was to feature a year-round winter sports complex in the mountains of Trojena.—AFP

Wins for SNGPL, SBP and KRL in President's Trophy

By Our Sports Reporter

KARACHI: Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Limited (SNGPL), State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) and Khan Research Laboratories (KRL) won their respective matches while the game between the Water and Power Development Authority (Wapda) and the Oil and Gas Development Company Limited (OGDCL) ended in a draw as the fifth round of the President's Trophy Grade-I ended in Karachi on Saturday.

Wapda (93 points), SNGPL (91) and KRL (90) are the top three teams on the table, making the next two rounds vital in terms of qualification for the final. PTV (77) are fourth. All four teams have won three games each.

SNGPL romped to a thumping 10-wicket victory over Ghani Glass as they chased a slim 39-run target at the National Bank Stadium.

Earlier, Ghani Glass resumed their second innings from overnight score of 125-1 following-on and with 126 more runs left to surmount before setting a target.

Ghani Glass' opener Khawaja Arham struck 141 -- his maiden first-class century — in the follow-on effort. Ghani Glass' batting crumbled after the second-wicket stand of 196 between Arham and Hammad Butt (77) ended.

In a spectacular collapse Ghani went from 202-1 to 289 all out. They earlier had incurred a 251-run first-innings deficit replying to SNGPL's 452.

Sajid Khan and Mohammad Ali picked up three wickets each while Shahnawaz Dahani and Shehzad Gul claimed two each. Shehzad was named player-of-the-match for his nine wickets in the game.

SBP routed Sahir Associates by nine wickets, as they chased a 63-run target at the SBP Sports Complex.

Mohammad Huraira (25 not out) and Abdullah Fazal (24 not out) shared a 45-run unbeaten stand.

Sahir Associates began the day from overnight second-innings score of 44-3 but slumped to 122 all out with SBP's Mohammad Abbas taking 5-38.

SBP's first-innings lead of 60 made sure they chased a small target to bag their second win in the event.

KRL also bagged a nine-wicket win over PTV at the UBL Sports Complex.

Openers Saad Baig (40 not out) and Shahzaib Khan (27) gave KRL a solid 54-run start, which completed the job for their team who were chasing a 75-run target.

Earlier, fast bowler Mohammad Hamza grabbed seven wickets for 39 to help KRL bundle out PTV for 94.

The defending champions had resumed the day at 27-3 and an overnight lead of seven after their first-innings total of 414 was matched by KRL's 434.

Wapda and OGDCL played out a draw after the former were set a 220-run target and had reached 88-3, when the time ran out at the KCCA Stadium.

Earlier, OGDCL's Danish Aziz starred with 101 not out in their second innings total of 267-8 declared.

OGDCL had conceded a 48-run first-innings deficit and were 117-6 at the close of play on day three.

With just a 69-run second-innings lead and four wickets in the bag, OGDCL began the final day with a possible defeat in sight but Danish struck his fourth-class century (101 not out) to back up his first innings score of 69 in a total of 159.

Danish was helped by Jawad Ali (18 off 138 balls) after coming in to bat at 110-6, while Asif Afridi also chipped in with a 43-ball 14. Mohammad Asghar picked up 4-79.

PBSA names squad for Asian Championships

By Our Sports Reporter

KARACHI: The Pakistan Billiards and Snooker Association (PBSA) has finalised a four-member squad to compete at the upcoming Asian Men's and Men's Under-21 Snooker Championships in Doha officials announced on Saturday.

The team will be led by the newly crowned national champion Mohammad Asif, who will be joined by the recent national runner-up Rana Irfan Mahmood in the senior men's category.

The youth challenge will be spearheaded by Ahsan Ramzan, the Asian U-21 bronze medallist in 2025 and Mohammad Hasnain Akhtar, the reigning IBSF U-17 world champion.

Naveed Kapadia, the PBSA secretary and tournament director of the recently concluded national championship, will serve as the delegate and team manager.

The players have commenced a training camp here at the Jahangir Khan Sports Complex, where they will practice for the event scheduled from Jan 31 to Feb 6.

The senior duo of Asif and Irfan will depart for Doha on Friday while the U-21 pair of Ahsan and Hasnain will follow on Sunday.

The PBSA expressed confidence in the selected squad, stating it was hopeful the players would "win laurels for the country" at the continental championship.

Inter thrash Pisa to maintain control in title race

MILAN: Inter Milan found themselves two goals down to relegation-battling Pisa but roared back to earn a 6-2 win at the San Siro on Friday, as the hosts continue to set the pace at the top of the Serie A standings.

Fans at a soaking San Siro were left in shock by Stefano Moreo's early brace, the first thanks to a howler from goalkeeper Yann Sommer.

MILAN: Inter Milan's Carlos Augusto (top) and Pisa SC's Idrissa Toure go for a header during their Serie A match at the San Siro.—Reuters

But Piotr Zielinski's penalty in the 39th minute sparked a comeback at the end of the first half, with strike pairing Lautaro Martinez and Pio Esposito both thumping home powerful headers to put Inter ahead at the break.

Inter missed plenty of chances to put Pisa away in the second half before Federico Dimarco found the net eight minutes from time, with Ange-Yoan Bonny and Henrikh Mkhitaryan netting late on to add some gloss to the victory — Inter's ninth win in a 10-match unbeaten run in the league.

"There was the desire to win the game, we didn't start very well but when I came on, the idea was to score one before half-time and after that it would have been a long second half [for Pisa]," Dimarco, who was introduced shortly before Zielinski scored, told DAZN.

"But we scored three, we reacted well. Sometimes, when you play a lot of games, you can approach a game the wrong way, but it was important to turn it around. It happens to make a mistake in the approach by playing so much, the important thing was to overturn it."

Inter move to 52 points, six ahead of second-placed AC Milan who are away to fourth-placed AS Roma on Sunday, with champions Napoli third on 43 points before facing Juventus. Pisa are bottom of the standings on 14 points.

This heavy defeat came after a dream start in the Tuscan side's first match against Inter at the San Siro since October 1990.

Inter controlled the early exchanges before gifting Pisa an 11th minute lead. Sommer came out of his area to collect a backpass but his wayward ball to Zielinski was met first time by Moreo's lobbed effort from distance with the keeper in no man's land.

Pisa doubled their lead 12 minutes later when Moreo met Matteo Tramoni's corner at the near post to power a header past Sommer.

Inter were handed a lifeline six minutes before the break when Zielinski's shot was handled by Tramoni in the area. Zielinski stepped up and smashed the spot kick down the middle into the roof of the net.

The hosts were level two minutes later, with Martinez heading home Dimarco's floated ball into the six-yard area. In stoppage time before the interval, Esposito powered a header into the net from Alessandro Bastoni's cross.

Dimarco's volleyed effort hit both posts before crossing the line as Inter finally made their second-half dominance pay and four minutes from the end Bonny collected Dimarco's pass, drove forward into the box and found the net from a wide angle.

Mkhitaryan bundled a header over the line after a corner in stoppage time and Inter can now focus again on the Champions League where they travel to face Borussia Dortmund on Wednesday.—Agencies

Barcola's winner sends PSG top despite lack of 'confidence'

AUXERRE: Coach Luis Enrique said that Paris Saint-Germain lacked confidence despite Bradley Barcola's deft chipped finish sending the champions back to the top of Ligue 1 with a 1-0 win away to Auxerre on Friday.

The 23-year-old winger had been the main threat as PSG peppered the home goal throughout the 90 minutes.

But until Barcola struck 10 minutes from time, it looked as if the hosts would hold out for a 0-0 draw against their illustrious visitors for the second year in a row, thanks in part to a mostly-inspired display by Auxerre goalkeeper Donovan Leon.

Luis Enrique was unimpressed with what he saw, despite victory taking PSG, temporarily at least, back above Lens, who could return to the league summit by winning their game in hand.

"I think it's very obvious, it's a strange moment. We're putting pressure on Lens, which is key," said Luis Enrique, whose European champions suffered a shock 2-1 defeat away to Sporting Lisbon in the Champions League in midweek.

"We're lacking a bit of confidence and accuracy to finish off chances, it was difficult," he added. "The players are not machines, today we weren't accurate with our passes and our ball movement. We can change that because everyone knows the individual quality we have in the team."

Auxerre, for their part, remain mired in the relegation zone, six points from safety.

PSG were off to a blistering start and could have been three goals up inside 10 minutes.

Barcola was twice thwarted by Leon, while a sliding Sinaly Diomande blocked Georgian winger Khvicha Kvaratskhelia's goalbound effort.

Leon was in action again just before the half-hour mark to parry a close range header from Goncalo Ramos.

The goalkeeper also made a double save with his legs in a chaotic goalmouth scramble to deny Kvaratskhelia and teenage talent Ibrahim Mbaye.

The chances kept coming after the break as Barcola flashed a shot wide and Kvaratskhelia's effort was deflected just past the post.

Barcola also saw a chip drop agonisingly onto the roof of the net.

For Auxerre, Danny Namaso and Lassine Sinayoko had speculative shots that failed to trouble Lucas Chevalier in the PSG goal.

Barcola was the main menace and another dart down the wing saw him chip a cross beyond Leon, who had made a rash dash from his box, but substitute Desire Doue somehow prodded wide of an empty goal from inside the six yard box.

Barcola was not to be denied, though, as Ballon d'Or winner Ousmane Dembele sent him clear after Auxerre were caught on the counter-attack after over-committing bodies at a corner.—AFP

AUXERRE: Paris St Germain's Bradley Barcola (top) scores during the Ligue 1 match against AJ Auxerre at the Stade de l'Abbe-Deschamps.—Reuters